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Fact Sheet

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Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)

What Is *Methicillin Resistant Staph Aureus (MRSA)***?**	MRSA is a resistant strain of Staphylococcus (Staph) bacteria, one of the most common causes of skin infection. Staph bacteria are commonly found on our skin in small numbers. As many as one third of all people can carry the bacteria and have no symptoms. Up to a third of Staph bacteria are resistant to commonly used antibiotics like Methicillin and erythromycin. Most MRSA infections are isolated cases and are not serious or invasive. Those cases are not reportable to the S.C. Dept. of Health & Environmental Control (DHEC). Clusters of MRSA are reportable to DHEC. In the past, Staph infections were treated with antibiotics related to penicillin. Treatment of these infections has become much harder as Staph and other bacteria have become resistant to antibiotics. Drug resistant Staph (MRSA) causes the same types of skin infections that are caused by other Staph strains, but are more difficult to treat. MRSA is also spread the same way as other Staph strains.
What are the symptoms?	The most common signs of Staph infection are localized redness, swelling, and tenderness. Staph skin infections can appear as boils or abscesses, which may drain pus, or as impetigo with fluid filled blisters. Many people can carry the bacteria and have no symptoms.
How is MRSA treated?	Like most Staph infections, MRSA infections can usually be treated with proper hygiene and appropriate antibiotics. However, since MRSA is resistant to common antibiotics, it is harder to treat and may require special antibiotics. Large boils and abscesses often require draining. Often, patients must be hospitalized for surgery and intravenous antibiotics. If you have an infection you should see your doctor.
How do people catch this disease?	MRSA is spread by direct contact with someone who has a Staph infection, or someone who is carrying the bacteria but does not have any symptoms. It can also be spread by objects such as towels, sports equipment, fitness equipment, or other items that have been contaminated by contact with the skin of a person with Staph infection or a Staph carrier. Clusters of Staph infection have been seen in athletes participating in contact sports such as football, basketball or wrestling, or in people using equipment that has been in direct contact with someone who has a Staph infection.
What can be done to stop the spread of this disease?	Good personal hygiene is key to preventing Staph infections. Wash your hands often and clean all cuts and bruises thoroughly. Cover all wounds. Don't share towels or other personal items. Be sure to clean fitness and sports equipment after each use. Bathe or shower with soap and water as soon as possible after participating in contact sports. Antibiotics are one of the truly great wonders of medicine. However, many bacteria are becoming resistant to them. It is important to take antibiotics only for bacterial infections to help reduce the spread of antibiotic resistant germs. Antibiotics are not effective for treating viruses and should not be taken for colds, the flu or other viral illnesses. If you are taking appropriate antibiotics for a bacterial infection, be sure to complete the course of treatment according to your doctor's recommendation.

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